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Peter Dayan

Why the Music of Satie is the Only Genuine Music of Paris Dada

The Dada movement's most constant talent was for the corrosion of rational definitions. Academic essays, on the other hand, have to work with rationally defined terms; that is a rule of their game. I find that the only way to write academically about Dada (and it is quite a pleasurable one) is to begin from generally accepted definitions of terms; then to allow Dada to unsettle them; and to conclude with revised definitions which are clearly themselves unsettled.

What was the music of Paris Dada? This question requires to be broken down into two underlying questions: what was Paris Dada? And within Paris Dada, what could be qualified as music? As we shall see, the answer to that latter question is by no means obvious.

Let us begin by assuming that music is audible sound. In that case, we can safely ignore the publications and the visual art exhibitions associated with Paris Dada. We need consider only, doubtless, the performances, the events put on in the name of Dada in Paris. What music was played at those events? But that question begs in turn another: how does one define a Paris Dada event? It is safest, one might think, in such circumstances, to go back to what was explicitly said at the time. I shall therefore take as my initial corpus the four events that took place in Paris in the 1920s which were marketed as Dada events, open to the general public. I shall go through them, one by one, setting out what music there was in each, as far as we can tell.

None of them contained any music by Erik Satie. This might initially seem surprising. His music had been performed at the last of the Zurich Dada soirées in April 1919, and it is a well-known fact that he and Tristan Tzara became the best of friends. But in fact, as we shall see, their friendship postdated the four events in question; and Satie's inclusion in the Zurich Dada programme was almost certainly thanks to Hans Heusser and Suzanne Perrottet, to whom Tzara delegated control over the selection of works by contemporary composers. In any case, Satie's omission from the Paris Dada programmes becomes understandable when one considers a general difference between Zurich Dada and Paris Dada soirées.

In Zurich, a significant proportion of the time in the soirées taken as a whole – at least a quarter – was taken up by music. Furthermore, in the Zurich Dada soirées as in the Cabaret Voltaire, a fair amount of the music performed was by more or less well-known composers, from Tchaikovsky to Schoenberg. Satie, in that context, could be seen as merely one composer among others. The four Paris Dada soirées, on the other hand, included relatively little music, and their programmes, as we shall see, did not list a single well-known composer.

The first of the four was the »matinée mouvement Dada« at the Grand Palais on 5 February 1920. It contained, according to the programme as according to all the evidence we have, no music at all, of any kind.¹

The second was the »Manifestation Dada« on 27 March 1920, at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre. This, according to its programme², contained three musical items. About one, we know nothing beyond what the programme tells us: »*Manifeste cannibale dans l'obscurité*, texte et musique de Francis Picabia, lu par André Breton et accompagné au piano par M^{lle} Marguerite Buffet«. No accounts of this piece have come down to us, to the best of my knowledge. It is generally the case, for reasons I have developed elsewhere³, that the Dadaists were very reluctant to write about the contribution of music to their performances; but the silence about the character of Picabia's music (if, indeed, the music was by him) was particularly absolute. Ribemont-Dessaignes, for example, says only that he has no clear memory of it.⁴

The last item on the programme of the »Manifestation Dada« was given as a »manifeste chanté par M^{lle} Hania Rouchine«. According to Tzara's recollections of the soirée, this turned out to be a song by Duparc:

¹ The best source of factual information on Paris Dada remains: Michel Sanouillet: *Dada à Paris*. Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée établie par Anne Sanouillet. Paris 1993. Sanouillet gives in his notes transcriptions of the programmes or prospectuses of all the Paris Dada events to which I refer. See p. 159 for the programme of the »matinée mouvement Dada«.

² See Sanouillet: *Dada à Paris*, p. 172.

³ See notably my article *The Inaudible Music of Dada*. In: *Silence and Absence in Literature and Music*. Ed. by Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart. Leiden, Boston 2016, pp. 152-65.

⁴ See Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes: *Déjà Jadis ou du mouvement Dada à l'espace abstrait*. Paris 1958, p. 71. Both the cover and the title page curiously give the first word of the book's title without the expected accent on the last letter.

Mlle Hania Routhine devait chanter à la fin de la pièce une chanson sentimentale de Duparc. Le public prit cela pour une profanation ou pensait que cette chose si simple qui devait marquer un contraste n'était pas à sa place ici [...] ⁵

Tzara's recollection is confirmed by Pierre de Massot, who wrote in 1921:

n'imaginèrent-ils pas afin de mystifier le public en délire de faire chanter des mélodies de Duparc par la toute charmante Hania Routhine? Le public qui sifflait, huait, hurlait, tempêtait fut pris à son propre piège, insultant ce qu'il aime. ⁶

Let us note that both Tzara and Massot describe the reception of the Duparc song (one song, or several? on this they diverge) as hostile not because of the song itself, or of its performance, but because of the context in which it was placed, coming after the reading of deliberately provocative Dada manifestos. Music which would normally have been received, in reverent silence, as art, became a further provocation when presented after the Dadaist rejection of artistic reverence. This never occurred in any of the Zurich Dada soirées – except the last. In all the others, we have no evidence that the music was received in any way other than in reverent silence. The last, however, was different. It took place, in April 1919, after the fateful meeting between Picabia and Tzara which led Dada to take a new direction, and subsequently to find a new home in Paris. At that final Zurich soirée, as in the Paris »Manifestation Dada«, a piece of tonal music – Hans Heusser's piano quartet in E flat major – was programmed at the end. But after a deliberately provocative manifesto (in Zurich, it had been by Walter Serner), the audience was in no mood to listen to it.

The other piece of music on the programme of the »Manifestation Dada« in 1920 is the *Pas de la chicorée frisée* by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. About this, we have recollections from the composer himself, who described, three decades later, how he had composed the piece

⁵ Tristan Tzara: Œuvres complètes. Bd. I (1912–1924). Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Henri Béhar. Paris 1975, pp. 595-96.

⁶ Pierre de Massot: De Mallarmé à 391. Saint-Raphaël 1922, p. 125.

by using a method for selecting notes randomly. Is music thus composed actually music? We will return to this question.

The third of the four Paris events was the »Festival Dada«, in the impressive surroundings of the salle Gaveau, on 26 May 1920.⁷ Once again, the only composers named on the programme were Picabia, and Ribemont-Dessaignes. By the latter, the programme lists: »*Le nombril interlope*, musique de Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, interprété par Marguerite Buffet.« About this piece, as far as I am aware, nothing whatsoever is known, though one can deduce from the name of the performer (who was Picabia's sister-in-law, and a well-known pianist) that it was played on the piano. It is less clear whether anything is known about »*La Nourrice américaine*, par Francis Picabia, musique sodomiste interprétée par M^{lle} Buffet«. As far as I can tell, in the writings of those who participated in the soirée, no information is provided about this piece. The major academic writings on Paris Dada (for example, by Sanouillet and Arfouilloux⁸) similarly have nothing to say about it. But, as will be readily discovered by googling, it seems to be generally accepted among musicians today that the piece consisted of three notes, endlessly repeated. (There is even a CD available which claims to give two performances of the piece.) Whether this is historically verifiable or not, I have been unable to ascertain.

According to several people who were there including Ribemont-Dessaignes, a fox-trot was also played on the organ (though memories diverge as to which fox-trot it was). Like the Duparc song at the end of the »Manifestation Dada«, this piece, doubtless inoffensive in itself, was turned by the context into a peculiarly effective provocation. Ribemont-Dessaignes writes:

C'est ainsi qu'une tomate mûre vint s'écraser sur une colonne de la loge où Mme Gaveau n'était pas sans s'indigner du spectacle auquel elle assistait. Cette digne dame suffoquait, parce que les grandes orgues, qui si souvent avaient joué de la musique de Bach, venaient de se livrer à une humiliante fantaisie en exécu-

⁷ The programme is given in Sanouillet: *Dada à Paris*, p. 183.

⁸ Sébastien Arfouilloux: *Que la nuit tombe sur l'orchestre. Surréalisme et musique*. Paris 2009.

tant le *Pélican*, un fox-trot à la mode, ce qui prenait figure de sarcasme.⁹

The fourth of the Paris events bore the title »Soirée Dada«, and took place on 10 June 1921, at the Salon Dada in the galerie Montaigne, where a Dada art exhibition was being held.¹⁰ There was singing as well as piano-playing. The singing was provided by a certain Monsieur Jolibois, whose day job was as a porcelain repairer, from the 6th arrondissement in Paris. He was, according to many accounts, rather the star of the show. He sang popular songs, including *La Marseillaise* at the end; he also sang, it would seem, the catalogue to the art exhibition, set to popular tunes. The only other apparently musical item listed was *Diableret*, by Paul Eluard, accompanied by two pianos. But what was it? What was being accompanied? Dance? mime? singing? poetry or recitation? We have, to the best of my knowledge, no evidence whatever; it is unclear who composed (or selected, or improvised) the music.

This overview of the four Paris Dada events leads us to the conclusion that the only composers named on any of the programmes are Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes. And we have no idea whatsoever what most of their music was like – or even, in the case of Picabia, whether all the music really was by him. The same applies to Eluard's *Diableret*, which, like Picabia's *Manifeste cannibale*, may have been simply a verbal text accompanied by unidentified music.

One might ask, then: shouldn't the music of Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes, plus perhaps that of Eluard (if it existed), be considered the genuine music of Paris Dada? I will now attempt to explain why my answer to this question is no. None of these three gentlemen provided Paris Dada with its genuine music. To explain why I say this, I will have to return to the question of what music is – and to the beginnings of Dada, in Zurich.

From the outset, Dada was a movement which pulled simultaneously in two directions, which quickly received the labels: art and anti-art. The original Zurich Dadaists saw this, and wrote about it at length. The most famous book on the subject is *Dada – Kunst und Antikunst* by Hans Rich-

⁹ Ribemont-Dessaignes: *Déjà Jadis*, p. 74.

¹⁰ For the programme, see Sanouillet: *Dada à Paris*, p. 292.

ter¹¹; but the theme is just as clear in the writings of Ball, Janco, and Arp, and it is central to the distinction that Huelsenbeck makes in 1920 in *En avant Dada. Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus* between Zurich Dada and Berlin Dada. Zurich Dada, led by Tzara and Ball, he says, always leaned towards art, more particularly abstract art: »Die Energien und Ehrgeize der Mitarbeiter des Kabarett Voltaire in Zürich waren von Anfang an rein künstlerische«, and Tzara and his allies »unter Dadaismus heute noch nicht viel anderes verstehen als ›l'art abstrait‹«. ¹² Indeed, he could have pointed out that the very first Dada manifesto, read out at the first Dada soirée in 1916 by Hugo Ball, had begun with the words: »Dada ist eine neue Kunstrichtung«. ¹³ Huelsenbeck had to go back to Germany to turn Dada into what he thought it should be: not a new direction for art, but a rejection of art. »In Deutschland ist der Dadaismus zu einer politischen Angelegenheit geworden, er hat die letzte Konsequenz gezogen und hat auf die Kunst ganz verzichtet«. ¹⁴ Correspondingly, there were two types of non-verbal sound in Zurich Dada. There was Huelsenbeck's drumming, which was anti-art and anti-music; in Hugo Ball's words, it aimed to »die Literatur in Grund und Boden trommeln«. ¹⁵ But the vast majority of the non-verbal sound in Zurich Dada was by any measure art music. It was composed music, either tonal or in the post-tonal tradition represented by Satie and Schoenberg. A high proportion of the participants in the Zurich Dada soirées – Hans Heusser, Sophie Taeuber, Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings and Suzanne Perrottet – were dedicated to that music, and there was a lot of it.

It has always been clear, then, that when attempting to discuss the aesthetics of Dada as it grew out of Zurich, one has to allow for the categories both of art, and of anti-art; and this should apply to music as much as to the visual and verbal arts. We should therefore be willing and able to make the distinction, in Dada, between music, and anti-music. The criterion for distinction between music and anti-music should be the same as

¹¹ Hans Richter: *Dada – Kunst und Antikunst. Der Beitrag Dadas zur Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Köln 1964.

¹² Richard Huelsenbeck: *En avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*. Hannover, Leipzig, Wien, Zürich 1920, p. 4.

¹³ Hugo Ball: *Eroöffnungs-Manifest, 1. Dada-Abend*. In: *Dada in Zürich*. Hans Bolliger, Guido Magnaguagno, Raimund Meyer. In Zusammenarbeit mit dem Kunsthaus Zürich. Zürich 1985, p. 256.

¹⁴ Huelsenbeck: *En avant Dada*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Hugo Ball: *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*. München, Leipzig 1927, p. 78.

for distinguishing between art and anti-art: it is the relationship to tradition. Dada art is certainly different from all previous art, as it drives towards abstraction. Nonetheless, in the very gesture in which it defines itself as a »neue Kunstrichtung«, it recognises itself as a development from previous art, and does not negate the value of earlier work. (On the contrary, it aims to show that all art is fundamentally one; hence its abiding fascination with African art, and primitive art generally.) Anti-art, on the other hand, refuses the value of art as it been defined for centuries, and takes Dadaism in other directions; in Huelsenbeck's case, towards politics. Satie would clearly, here, be on the side of music; Huelsenbeck and his drum, on the side of anti-music. On which side should one place the contributions of Ribemont-Dessaignes and Picabia? Should they be classed as music, or as anti-music?

I have to admit that I have been able to find out nothing at all about Picabia's music, except for the fact that, as I have said, it is widely believed today that *La Nourrice américaine* consisted of three notes endlessly repeated. Gabrielle Buffet, Picabia's first wife and the sister of the pianist who apparently performed it, wrote a great deal about Picabia and about Dada. (She died in 1985, at the age of 104). She was herself a trained pianist and composer. One might have expected her to have something to say about Picabia's music. But I have been unable to find any reference to it in her writings. She discusses his visual art, his career, his poetry; she never mentions his music. If he had had any interest in her musical activities, she would certainly have said so, and she does not. Conversely, if his musical activities had been of any interest to her, she would have said so; but she does not. It seems clear to me that he lacked musical training, talent, and experience – and indeed, that he was not really very interested in music. His compositions, then, are unlikely to have developed from (or even in reaction against) the musical tradition, as his painting and poetry certainly developed out of, and in reaction against, the painting and poetry of his time. It is unlikely to have been music as Ball, Tzara, Heusser or Satie would have understood it. If it is true that *La Nourrice américaine* consisted of three endlessly repeated notes, this would confirm the point. Certainly, Satie also wrote a piece that was designed to be repeated many times, though not endlessly – *Vexations*; but that is not three notes. It lasts about two minutes, and is harmonically extraordinarily subtle, being carefully composed to produce a remarkable destabilising effect when repeated, as those who have performed or heard

it have often said. I do not feel it is going too far to say that in terms of the aesthetics of Dada, *Vexations* is clearly music, whereas the three-note *Nourrice américaine* would be just as clearly anti-music.

Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes did have some musical training. But he carefully did not use that training when he produced music for Paris Dada. Instead, he called on chance. The notes and the harmonies were randomly chosen, by spinning a wheel. He describes how he remembers the effect on the audience:

le *Pas de la Chicorée frisée*, composé suivant des notes que j'avais choisies arbitrairement, en laissant au hasard le soin d'en décider, provoqua un tel scandale qu'assis à côté de la pianiste pour tourner les pages de la partition, j'étais submergé par un vacarme inouï, fait de la musique terriblement peu consonnante, du murmure continu de la salle, de ses cris, de ses coups de sifflet, qui s'unissaient dans un fracas de verre brisé du plus curieux effet.¹⁶

Here we must place the pivotal question: what is the role of chance in art, especially Dada art? Is it on the side of art, or of anti-art?

Tristan Tzara, like Hans Arp and like Marcel Duchamp, certainly courted chance in his art, as a means to escape the rational. Perhaps one of his best-known writings is his recipe for writing a Dada poem: one takes a newspaper article of the appropriate length, one cuts it up into its constituent words, one puts the words in a bag, then one takes them out in random order, and the result is a poem.¹⁷ This sits well with the public perception of Dada as an anarchistic, anti-art movement, aiming to destroy the human agency that the 19th century had considered at the root of all art. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Wikipedia article on Tzara cites this recipe, apparently taking it utterly seriously.

However, it is absolutely plain that Tzara himself did not take it at all seriously. The fact is that in a lifetime of intense poetic activity, he never composed a poem by this means.¹⁸ On the contrary: all his poetry shows

¹⁶ Ribemont-Dessaignes: *Déjà Jadis*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷ See Tristan Tzara: *Pour faire un poème dadaïste*. In: Tzara: *Œuvres complètes*. Tome 1, p. 382.

¹⁸ Henri Béhar, pointing out in a note of characteristic sagacity (*ibid.*, p. 703) that this recipe cannot be taken at face value, suggests that the only poem

unmistakeable signs not only of his own poetic agency, but also of his profound awareness of its roots in the poetic tradition, even where it is in reaction against that tradition.

Let us take as our example of a Tzara poem the *Chanson Dada*, published in *De nos oiseaux*, where he assigns to it the date 1921 (thus, during the Paris Dada years). Here is the first section of the poem:

la chanson d'un dadaïste
qui avait dada au cœur
fatiguait trop son moteur
qui avait dada au cœur

l'ascenseur portait un roi
lourd fragile autonome
il coupa son grand bras droit
l'envoya au pape à rome

c'est pourquoi
l'ascenseur
n'avait plus dada au cœur

mangez du chocolat
lavez votre cerveau
dada
dada
buvez de l'eau¹⁹

I could happily spend an entire article analysing the ways in which this poem takes up and plays with the traditional rules of French versification, concerning rhyme, syllable count, and strophic form. It shows Tzara to be a master of pastiche, irony, and satire, as well as truly original. Traditional versification is, of course, based on the repetition of elements; and

Tzara ever composed by this method was the one that he published with the recipe, as an example. However, it seems clear to me that even this poem was not, in fact, composed by chance. It contains too many grammatically plausible concatenations, and associations of words that have clear thematic links to his other poems.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

it is particularly through the use of repetition and variation that Tzara creates his twists on tradition. This, plainly, has nothing to do with randomness. It is, however, very closely related to the way that Erik Satie composed in the 1920s. I would contend that his ballet music especially, for *Parade*, *Mercure*, and *Relâche*, shows precisely the same relationship to the traditions of his medium, and to the uses of repetition.

In Hans Richter's film *Dadascope*, made in 1961, Tzara sings his *Chanson Dada*, to a tune which, we are told by a caption, was composed by Georges Auric. The tune is quite a catchy one. It is clearly fundamentally tonal, but does not quite have the squareness and simplicity of traditional popular songs, and as Tzara sings (unaccompanied), one is not always sure exactly how to interpret rhythms – or, occasionally, pitches. The overall effect, once again, is not at all of randomness, but rather of a twisting of a well-known and deliberately pastiche tradition, with the role of repetition being especially troubling. I do not have space, here, to conduct a proper stylistic parallel analysis of Tzara's poetry, Auric's tune (as rendered by Tzara), and Satie's ballet music; but I hope it will at least be already clear that they share certain fundamental traits. They work through, with, and in direct reaction against the traditional techniques of their medium, rather than simply rejecting those techniques. They exploit and subvert tradition, rather than ignoring it. They are plainly to be received (and, indeed, have always been received) as the works of their creators, embodying a certain kind of artistic agency, and not as products of chance. In short, in terms of the Zurich Dada distinction between art and anti-art, they are clearly on the side of art, not on the side of anti-art.

It was towards the middle of 1921 that Satie and Tzara became friends. This was too late for the four Paris Dada events I have discussed. It was also, probably, after the three performances of Satie's play *Le Piège de Méduse* in May 1921 at the Théâtre Michel, which as far as I know Tzara did not attend. (Or did he? Was that the catalyst for his friendship with Satie? Once again, I have to admit I don't know.) Once they had become friends, they remained friends until Satie's death in 1925. Their friendship was cemented by their common opposition to Breton during the affair of the Congrès de Paris in February 1922, when they both signed, along with Ribemont-Dessaignes and Eluard, the famous open letter to the journal *Comœdia* condemning Breton's plans to hold a congress to determine the direction of the new spirit. »[N]ous pensons

qu'il est temps de mettre fin à ces histoires de papes, et de défendre notre liberté».²⁰

Fifteen months later, on 6 July 1923, there was another event whose relationship with the Dada canon has always been seen as ambiguous: the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe«, in the théâtre Michel (the same venue as *Le Piège de Méduse*, two years earlier). The soirée was clearly Dadaist in inspiration, in many ways; but the word Dada is not used in the publicity for the event. Why not? Sanouillet suggests that it was because no theatre director would allow his venue to be used for an explicitly Dada event, after the storminess of the 1920/21 events.²¹ I think it is also because the word »Dada« had been too tangled in the controversies with Breton and his nascent surrealist movement. Dada had become a label for a movement opposed to others; and this was something that neither Tzara nor Satie could identify with. No more »histoires de papes«, as they had said in the letter condemning Breton. So the word Dada was dropped, along with Breton himself, who was not invited to play any part in the soirée. But at the same time, Tzara's new friend Erik Satie was brought in – the ultimate anti-papist and enemy of movements, the man who founded a church of which he was destined to be forever the only member, the »Eglise métropolitaine d'art de Jesus conducteur«.

According to Ornella Volta, the highest authority on all things Satie, Tzara asked Satie to organise the music for the event.²² This certainly seems highly plausible given the list of composers given at the very beginning of the prospectus advertising the soirée: Auric, Milhaud, Satie himself, and Stravinsky. (The programme gives the names in alphabetical order.) Whereas the four preceding events had not a single well-known composer named on the programme, the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe« thus listed four, in the most prominent place on its publicity. All of those composers have in common that attitude to tradition which I have tried to define as typical of Dada art, as opposed to anti-art: pastiche, development, repetition, and subversion, rather than simple rejection. Auric, Milhaud and Stravinsky were well known to Satie, and good friends. His relationship with Auric later became stormy, but both Auric and Milhaud had been members of the group known as »les Six« which, in 1920/21,

²⁰ Erik Satie: *Correspondance presque complète*. Réunie, établie et présentée par Ornella Volta. Deuxième édition entièrement révisée. Paris 2003, p. 474.

²¹ See Sanouillet: *Dada à Paris*, p. 393.

²² See Satie: *Correspondance presque complète*, p. 1141.

had been closely identified with Satie's influence, and remained in 1923 among the young composers for whose music Satie had the most sympathy. As for Stravinsky, he was, for Satie, since the death of Debussy, indubitably the greatest living composer. In short, it is clear that the choice of composers for the soirée reflects the aesthetics of Erik Satie. It is his kind of music, not the anti-music of Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes. To those four should be added Georges Antheil, who was to provide music to go with three short films, by Charles Sheeler, Hans Richter, and Man Ray.

I would go so far as to say that the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe«, as planned and programmed by Tzara and his friends at the time, has more in common with the Zurich Dada soirées than with the four previous Paris Dada events. The most striking similarity, for me, is that the performers listed include a string quartet (the »quatuor Capelle«) as well as a female pianist (Marcelle Meyer). No string players took part in any of the four earlier Paris Dada events, but string-playing was certainly present in Zurich Dada; indeed the last work programmed for the last Zurich Dada soirée was a piano quartet by Hans Heusser. As is the case for all the Zurich Dada soirées except the last, we have no evidence that the music was received as in any way provocative, or interrupted by the audience; it was, as far as one can tell, listened to with due respect for the tradition to which it belonged.

The soirée was set to end with a performance of Tzara's play *Le Cœur à gaz*, also, it would seem, intended to be experienced as art, rather than as anti-art. Sanouillet describes this as a plan which did not fit well with Dada aesthetics. He gives Eluard's opinion on the matter:

Si M. Tristan Tzara a cru devoir habiller cette pièce avec les costumes de M^{me} Delaunay et des décors cubistes, s'il a voulu la présenter au public dans un pot-pourri d'œuvres de célébrités dites »modernes«, c'est dans un but indiscutablement artistique auquel ses amis d'autrefois ne pouvaient se rallier.²³

Eluard was certainly right to say that Tzara's aim was artistic, as Satie's had always been. He was, however, wrong, as, it seems to me, as is Sanouillet, to suggest that this artistic aim was fundamentally at odds with Dada. On the contrary: Dada had begun, in Zurich, precisely with

²³

Sanouillet: Dada à Paris, p. 396.

such performances, including costumes (by Sophie Taeuber, especially) already described as cubist. It was only from 1919 that Dada had become dominated by its anti-artistic tendency. Tzara, assisted by Satie, in the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe«, was attempting to take it back towards its earlier, more artistic, more musical roots.

Eluard, however, assisted by Breton, was determined to sabotage this shift. Tzara's former friends, he says,

n'avaient qu'un moyen à leur disposition: saboter non seulement la représentation mais rendre publics et irrémédiables leurs dissentiments. Le meilleur moyen était de mettre Dada dans la salle et de provoquer systématiquement l'auteur et les acteurs. C'est ce qu'ils ont fait.²⁴

They certainly did, by the simple expedient of getting on stage and physically assaulting the participants in the soirée. Breton, as is well known, broke the arm of Pierre de Massot, during the performance of some poetry. Eluard slapped the faces of Tzara and René Crevel when they appeared to act in the play. The police intervened to eject Breton, and friends of Tzara used force to restrain Eluard.

In the Dada events of 1920/21, the Dadaists had clearly aimed to provoke a reaction of outrage in the general public. They succeeded in this by the presentation of »anti-art« on stage. In the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe«, this was not their aim, and indeed it did not happen. But Breton and Eluard, along with a few others including Aragon, objecting to the art on stage, took it upon themselves to provide their own »anti-art« reaction to it. The violence of that reaction was decisive. For Tzara, who hated physical violence, a red line had been crossed. He never again attempted to organise such a soirée.

The conclusions I would draw from the foregoing are these. The four Paris Dada events of 1920/21 contained much anti-music – both music written as anti-music (by Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes), and music which became anti-music by virtue of its provocative presentation: the fox-trot played on the Salle Gaveau organ, the Duparc songs presented after the anti-art manifestos. Their programmes contained no music attributed to specific composers that cannot be thus characterised as anti-music. It is true that the popular songs performed by Jolibois in the 1921

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 396-97.

»soirée Dada« might been received as music; but it is equally clear that by characterising him as a porcelain-repairer rather than a singer, the Dadaists were mocking at the same time as they were celebrating his craft. The »soirée du Cœur à Barbe« was not in name a Dada event. It was, however, very similar in its aesthetic programme to the Zurich Dada soirées; more similar to Zurich Dada than to the four Paris Dada events of 1920/21. It contained music, presented and received as music, not as anti-music, by composers whose relationship to the musical tradition was at root the same as that of the composers celebrated in Zurich Dada. These composers were selected by Erik Satie, who also participated in the performance (of his *Morceaux en forme de poire*). The music of that soirée, though of course not all composed by him, was very much *his* music: the kind of music he enjoyed and admired, the music of his time according to his lights. It was also the music that Tzara enjoyed and admired. Nearly forty years later, in *Dadascope*, it was a tune attributed to one of those composers – Auric – that we hear Tzara singing.

I am not, then, claiming that Satie wrote the only genuine Paris Dada music. Rather, I am claiming that before Satie joined the movement, Paris Dada had no genuine music – only anti-music; and that the music which was performed in the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe« was very precisely what he thought of as music. Picabia himself was certainly able to make the distinction between anti-music, which could only ever be a short sharp provocative gesture, and music, which could sustain an extensive performance. When, only a few months after the »soirée du Cœur à Barbe«, he began putting together a ballet – *Relâche* – he did not himself compose the music; he could not have done. He called on Erik Satie.